

# Early Literacy Instruction: Different Texts for Different Purposes

## Introduction

Decades of research evidence have led to the identification of 5 key pillars of early literacy and reading instruction: **Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension** (NICHD, 2000). A plethora of research evidence from the Science of Reading suggests that characteristics of the texts used in reading instruction can impact students' reading processes and progress (e.g., Eason et al., 2012; Fitzgerald et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2016). There is a clear need for educators to be able to select different texts to support various instructional purposes.

## Decodable Readers: What Research Says

- **What it is:** Decodable texts are those which have been carefully constructed to provide practice on all 44 phonemes and the 250 associated graphemes in a systematic manner (Stein et al., 1999), and to minimize repetition of words to ensure that students are using decoding skills rather than memorizing words (Hiebert, 2017).
- **Primary reading skills addressed: phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency**
- **Recommended grades:** Early elementary grades (K–2nd grade) where cracking the code is the focal point

## Leveled Readers: What Research Says

- **What it is:** Leveled readers are texts that have been classified according to readability level. Leveled readers are used as part of the guided reading approach to help teachers match students to texts at their "instructional level" based on the three reading levels defined by Betts (1946): **independent** (can be read unassisted), **instructional** (can be read with 95–98% accuracy and 75–89% comprehension), and **frustration** (too difficult even with support).
- **Primary reading skills addressed:** independent level for **phonics** and **fluency**, while instructional level texts can be used by teachers to deliver targeted small-group instruction in **vocabulary** and **comprehension**
- **Recommended grades:** Elementary grades after basic decoding skills are learned

## Read-Aloud/Trade Books: What Research Says

- **What it is:** High-quality trade books for children, or authentic texts, contain rich content, sophisticated vocabulary, and complex language. Research has shown that authentic texts are linked to higher reading engagement and motivation, especially when students are allowed choice (Guthrie et al., 2007). Many of these texts can be used as read-alouds. Read-aloud texts are typically more difficult for children than their independent reading level, and teachers conduct read-alouds to model fluent reading, build oral and listening comprehension skills, and demonstrate that the language of the book is different from spoken language (Fisher et al., 2004). Wide reading on a variety of topics also builds the background knowledge required to read increasingly complex texts (Wolf, 2018).
- **Primary reading skills addressed: vocabulary and comprehension**
- **Recommended grades:** All

### Primary Reading Skills Addressed

Phonemic Awareness	Phonics	Fluency	Vocabulary	Comprehension
Decodable Readers				
		Leveled Readers		
			Trade Books	

## Comparison Chart: Decodable Readers, Leveled Readers, and Trade Books

Book Type	Advantages / Best Practices	How is it appropriately used?	Which grades or at what stage is it best to use?
<b>Decodable Readers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides practice on the 44 phonemes and the 250 associated graphemes</li> <li>• Constructed to ensure that students are using decoding skills rather than relying on memorized words</li> <li>• Can be used to practice students' fluency of decodable text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a systematic and cumulative method of helping young readers develop decoding skills</li> <li>• Individually, partner-reading, small-group, with teacher support and scaffolding as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early elementary grades, where decoding skills are the focal point</li> </ul>
<b>Leveled Readers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aids teachers to group students to deliver targeted instruction</li> <li>• Assists teachers to efficiently match students to texts</li> <li>• Constructed with readability levels that provide a guided environment for learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a guided manner of helping young readers develop foundational literacy skills</li> <li>• Individually, partner-reading, small-group, with teacher support and scaffolding as needed</li> <li>• Prepares teachers to offer a range of scaffolding supports to students to increase the amount of texts they can access</li> <li>• Prepares teachers to use informational texts in classrooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elementary grades, where word recognition and fluency are the focal point but a basic level of decoding has been achieved; text can be used to build vocabulary and comprehension</li> </ul>
<b>Read-Aloud/ Trade Books</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides high-quality authentic texts that contain rich content, sophisticated vocabulary, and complex language</li> <li>• Can form part of a wide-ranging and varied content consisting of both narrative and informational text</li> <li>• Can be motivating and engaging for readers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be used as read-alouds led by teachers so students can access more challenging text</li> <li>• Can be accessed as audiobooks</li> <li>• As part of inquiry learning</li> <li>• Can be taught together with dictionary skills for vocabulary development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All grades, with appropriate teacher support and scaffolding where needed</li> <li>• For early elementary grades, as teacher read-alouds to build knowledge and vocabulary</li> </ul>

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